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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5381
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 9903
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0615
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1067
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 5986
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 006649

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ FACES TOUGH JOB NEGOTIATING HUMANITARIAN
EXCHANGE WITH THE FARC

REF: BOGOTA 6520

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield - Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary. On August 31, President Uribe and Venezuelan President Chavez discussed Chavez' efforts to facilitate a "humanitarian exchange" of FARC-held hostages for FARC prisoners in Colombian jails. Uribe ruled out any demilitarized area ("despeje") or return of released prisoners to FARC ranks. Opposition Senator Piedad Cordoba, also authorized by Uribe to act as an intermediary with the FARC, told us the three Americans held by the FARC should be part of any exchange. The GOC said a possible Chavez meeting with the FARC in the Colombian jungle was "not viable." End summary.

Uribe Agrees to Limited Chavez Role with FARC

12. (C) On August 31, President Alvaro Uribe and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez discussed Chavez' efforts to facilitate a possible "humanitarian exchange" of hostages held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for imprisoned FARC members in Colombian jails. Uribe ruled out the FARC's demand for a demilitarized zone ("despeje") to hold talks on an accord as well as the return of any released prisoners to FARC ranks. Far-left Colombian Liberal Party Senator Piedad Cordoba (a staunch Chavista), who Uribe had previously authorized to act as an intermediary with the FARC on an exchange and who invited Chavez to participate, also attended the Uribe-Chavez meeting.

Three Americans Part of Any Deal

13. (C) On September 7, Cordoba told DCM the three U.S. hostages held by the FARC (Thomas Howes, Keith Stansell and Marc Gonsalves) have to be part of any exchange. "We need to work together," Cordoba said, "to bring all of the hostages--including the Americans--home." Cordoba met with South American ambassadors in Bogota and opposition Polo Democratico Party officials to seek support. She said she will soon brief European ambassadors, local Colombian officials, Panamanian President Martin Torrijos, and others on her efforts. Cordoba told us Uribe was taking a gamble by including Chavez in the talks, and claimed she sought to build political support for him through her outreach.

14. (C) Cordoba said she had contacted the FARC and expects to meet with FARC representatives by September 24--though no time or place is set. She had no idea what to expect if she meets with them. The DCM told Cordoba the USG supported her efforts to reach a humanitarian accord if it followed Uribe's conditions, and reiterated that Howes, Stansell and Gonsalves should be included in any exchange. Chavez said on in his weekly television show on September 9 that FARC leader Manuel Marulanda had invited him to meet in the jungles of Colombia--something he would only do with GOC approval. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said September 11 that a Chavez-FARC meeting in the Colombian jungle was "not viable." Restrepo met for two hours with Chavez in Caracas on September 7 to discuss the facilitation effort.

Chavez Role Limited

15. (C) Senior Uribe advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us September 7 that Uribe authorized Chavez and Cordoba to work only on a humanitarian exchange, not a broader peace process. Uribe thinks his public conditions will keep Chavez reined in, and the GOC believes Cordoba and Chavez will respect the rules of the game. Gaviria said "Uribe knows Chavez as well as the terrain." Communications director Jorge Eastman told us separately Chavez touched on the "despeje" issue with Uribe on August 31, but did not push hard. Cordoba said Uribe and Chavez also discussed a December 13, 2005, European proposal which called for a 70 square mile zone to hold talks. Gaviria said the GOC has no problems with Cordoba reaching out to domestic and international leaders to seek support for the initiative.

16. (C) Gaviria said the GOC would not accept the opening of a FARC "office" in Caracas as part of a deal or negotiating process. The GOC's position on the status of FARC members "Simon Trinidad" and "Sonia" (convicted in the United States for terrorism and drug charges, respectively) is that they no longer fall within its jurisdiction. The two remain in U.S. custody, and the GOC cannot obtain their return. Gaviria confirmed that all hostages, including the three Americans, should form part of any exchange. He said if the FARC offered to release all hostages except for the Americans, "it would be difficult to envision President Uribe accepting such a deal."

Chavez "Not a Friend of the FARC"

17. (C) Gaviria told us Chavez "is not a friend of the FARC." FARC narcotrafficking, kidnapping and other criminal activities along the border have created problems for him. At the same time, the FARC dislikes surrendering the initiative to Chavez. Gaviria said Uribe doubts the FARC will agree to an exchange in the end, because the FARC cannot afford to release Ingrid Betancourt and other high-profile hostages. To do so would surrender the only card that gives the FARC relevance in Europe.

Brownfield